

14. NESTING SITES OF HOUSE SPARROW *PASSER DOMESTICUS*

On September 4, 1996, along the Vastana roadside in Matar tehsil, Kheda dist., Gujarat, we saw a pair of house sparrows *Passer domesticus* nesting below the nest of some large bird (probably an abandoned nest of house crow), with the support of the electric pole edge. The location of the pole was away from the village, along the road passing through the paddy fields. Nesting material was seen to be collected by the male sparrow from the roadside, on September 4 and 5, 1996, at noon. A similar nest location was recorded at Bamroli village in Nadiad tehsil, in the same district. The sparrow had made its nests below the nest of Whitenecked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* on a neem tree *Azadirachta indica*.

Though the whitethroated munia *Lonchura malabarica* is known to build its nest below the nest platform of some large birds (Parasharya 1982, Ali and Ripley 1983), the Indian house sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus*

is not known to show such behaviour (Ali and Ripley 1983, Mathew 1987). The house sparrow in Britain is known to nest in the walls of the active nests of large birds, particularly rooks *Corvus frugilegus* and magpie *Pica pica*; and in other European countries with nests of stork and birds of prey (Summer-Smith 1963). The present record confirms this behaviour in the Indian subspecies. A nest on an electric pole at least 2 km away from the village (human habitation) is an additional adaptation to exploit abundant food supply — a tendency towards independent existence but with extensive protection.

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15. SOUTHERN BLACKHEADED MUNIA *LONCHURA MALACCA MALACCA* IN KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK, BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

On November 12, 1996, a small flock of 5-6 southern blackheaded munia (*Lonchura malacca malacca*) was spotted feeding in a reed patch alongside a stream in Koladher area of the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur, Rajasthan. Koladher is a grassland with scrub and acacia trees.

The munias were in black and white plumage, with white underparts. According to Ali and Ripley (1983), out of three races of

*Lonchura malacca*, only the southern race *L. m. malacca* has white underparts. The other two subspecies *L.m. rubriniger* and *L.m. atricipala* have rufous underparts and are distinguishable in the field from *L.m. malacca*. Vijayan (1991) reporting on the study conducted at Bharatpur from 1980-90 does not record this species. Abdulali and Pandey (1978) listed this species as a stray, without specifying the subspecies. Vyas (1996) recorded having seen a flock of 20 birds



at Madanpur, Delhi on July 6, 1996, but did not specify the plumage details to enable recognition of the subspecies. Since the flock was seen in the typical habitat some distance away from any large city, the chances of these birds being an escape population does not seem possible.

According to Ali and Ripley (1983), the subspecies *L.m. rubriniger* is found from Himalayan duns, terai and plains of Uttar Pradesh eastwards to eastern Nepal and south to Patna (Bihar) and Lucknow (U.P.). The subspecies *L.m. atricipala* is found from eastern Nepal eastward to Assam, Manipur and Bangladesh and south to northern Bihar and northern Orissa. The subspecies *L.m. malacca* is found in Raipur, Pachmarhi (Madhya Pradesh) and Mumbai, south to Kanyakumari. This indicates that it prefers good rainfall areas and thus is not

recorded by Ali and Ripley (1983) from the drier parts of northern and northwestern India. The distribution of this subspecies in Ali and Ripley (1983) is based on several old records and it will be worthwhile to compile recent sighting and breeding records to ascertain whether this sighting at Bharatpur was a stray record or there is a shift in the distribution of this subspecies. It may be noted that in the last three decades, northern and northwestern India has seen the emergence of large scale irrigation activity, having a major impact on the ecology of these dry areas.

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## 16. THE BROWN ROOFED TURTLE *KACHUGA SMITHII PALLIDIPE* MOLL, IN THE BRAHMAPUTRA DRAINAGE

The brown roofed turtle *Kachuga smithii* (Gray 1863) has two subspecies distinguished by the colouration of headshell, limbs and penis. The nominate subspecies has a plastral pattern of large dark brown to black blotches on each scute, narrowly bordered with yellow; the head, limbs, feet and penis are darkly pigmented (Das 1995); The subspecies *pallidipes* lacks the plastral pattern of dark blotches and has reduced pigmentation on head, limbs, feet and penis.

During August 1997, a live *Kachuga smithii pallidipes* was caught in a net in the Brahmaputra river near Kukurmara, 26° 03' N, 91° 25' E, Kamrup dist., Assam. It was an adult

male weighing 105 gm with 9.4 cm CCL, 8.8 cm CCW, 8.4 cm SCL, 6.5 cm SCW and 7.8 cm PL. The carapace was olive with a faint yellowish rim at the periphery. The dorsal keel was slightly brown up to vertebral 3. The plastron was pale yellow and prominent dark blotches were present on the ventral side of the marginals forming a broad rim at the periphery. Other characteristics were similar to the description of Moll (1987). The specimen lacked a spine as shown by the nominate subspecies of this region (Choudhury 1996).

The subspecies *pallidipes* has been reported from Bherihari Wildlife Sanctuary